

Chapter 9

“I Think of Myself as Norwegian, Although I Feel that I Am from Another Country.” Children Constructing Ethnic Identity in Diverse Cultural Contexts in Oslo, Norway

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Growing up, children contest many issues, including the identities that they and those around them construct. This chapter discusses the ethnic identity construction of Norwegian-born children with foreign parents at a place and school located in the ethnically diverse Grorud Valley east of Oslo, Norway. I write about the school here using the pseudonym Dal. My discussion of children’s ethnic identity construction builds on previous research (Rysst 2012, 2013, 2014) which I analyze here in light of the concept of “migrancy” as a social space. This concept is understood as “the socially constructed subjectivity of ‘migrant,’ or ‘foreigner,’ which is inscribed on certain bodies by the larger society in general” (Näre 2012, 604). According to Lena Näre, “its subjectivity is very seldom, if ever, embraced by migrants themselves” (Näre 2012, 605). In the present study, however, the children do talk about each other, and themselves, as “foreigners,” yet sometimes also as “Norwegians” and mostly in terms of hybrid identities such as “Norwegian-Pakistani.” The terms used depend on the social context.

Like many other European countries, Norway has experienced increased ethnic and racial diversity because of immigration since the late 1960s. Today, immigrants and Norwegian-born children with both parents born abroad constitute 15.6 % (roughly five million people) of the total population of Norway (Statistics Norway 2015a). About 25 % of all immigrants in Norway live in Oslo. A growing city of 650,000 inhabitants, Oslo is home to 160,000 immigrants and 48,000 persons born in Norway whose parents were both born abroad. The single largest nationalities represented in the immigrant population are Pakistanis, Poles, Swedes, and Somalis (Statistics Norway 2015b). This situation makes parts of the city of Oslo very ethnically and culturally diverse. In Dal, ethnic Norwegians, here defined in line

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with local usage as persons born in Norway and whose parents and grandparents were all also born in Norway, constitute a minority. The borough of Dal has approximately 9,500 inhabitants; immigrants and their Norwegian-born children make up nearly 70 per cent of this population (Wiggen et al. 2015). The most numerous groups are Pakistanis, Turks, Moroccans, Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians, and Somalis. This diversity challenges the stereotypical notion of Norway as “homogenous people made up of Lutheran peasants and fishermen” (Seeberg 2003, 25).

Based on participant observation and interviews with the children I got to know in Dal, I argue that the childhoods of children living in ethnically diverse contexts are often contested because of conflicting cultural values. As they grow up, these children have to negotiate their parents’ cultural values and the cultural values of the Norwegian society regarding ethnic identity construction. “Ethnic identity” can refer to people’s sense of historical national belonging, as is the case with Pakistani, Norwegian or Turkish populations. It can also refer to minority groups within a nation state, as with Kurdish populations within Turkey or Iraq. Childhood, which is socially constructed to encompass society’s conceptualization of a child and expectations vis-à-vis children of different ages becomes a contested space (Wells 2009, 2). As such, this chapter is written in line with what Seeberg and Goździak write in Chap. 1, page 12, about “national populations that tend to more or less comply with official understandings of what childhood should be like.”

In this contested space, children face tensions regarding who they are and aspire to be in relation to age, ethnicity, and gender. For instance, some children—particularly teenage girls from immigrant families—do not return to school after the summer holidays because they are kept behind in their families’ countries of origin. This may happen because their parents do not want them to become “too Norwegian,” meaning for example that they disapprove of their daughters dressing in clothes that do not cover the body according to their cultural values or date. Parents worry that their daughters will marry against their wishes (Yusuf 2014). This situation is worrisome for both children and school personnel. It is also an illustration of conflicting cultural values, and thus of a contested childhood. It appears hard for children of foreign-born parents to escape the migrancy framework. In this chapter, I address these questions: how do children and youth in Dal construct identity at the intersection of age, gender, ethnicity and religion? How and why do they relate to the ubiquitous categories of “Norwegian” and “foreigner”?

The Field Site and Methodology

The field site and the school where I conducted my research are located in a suburb east of Oslo. This school caters to pupils between the ages of ten and sixteen. Information from the local school administration states that there are approximately 460 students in the school living in families originating in sixteen to eighteen different countries. Ethnic Norwegians constitute a minority, while Pakistanis are

the most numerous. Other countries represented include Turkey, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Morocco, Somalia, Gambia, Nigeria, and Vietnam. One boy, David, is of mixed origin, having an ethnic Norwegian mother and West-African father. In 2010–2011, I did research, including long-term participant observation, on consumption and integration in the same school with students in the 5th and 6th grades (Rysst 2012, 2013, 2014). At the time of the present research conducted two years later, these children were thirteen and fourteen years old. These teens constitute the primary informants in my follow-up study. Among these, only Pernille is an undisputed ethnic Norwegian, while David has mixed origin. I wanted to talk again with the children I already knew (Rysst 2012) but I also included two new girls I found particularly interesting because of their gendered presentation of self which I found to be in conflict with the dominant Islam-inspired gender images in Dal.

I was present in the classroom and outside in the schoolyard at breaks once a week for three months in the 8th and 9th grades. I arranged and conducted five informal group interviews with nine children—seven girls and two boys. These groups consisted of friends, that is, children I knew hung out together. In methodological terms, the interviews were in focus groups, which I believe have the potential of bringing forth more information than individual interviews, particularly if the group atmosphere is based on trust among the participants and between the participants and the researcher (Thagaard 2013). One of the methodological advantages of long-term participant observation is a fair chance of achieving relations based on trust and the children included in this study were all happy to participate. They knew each other and myself quite well before the interviews started, which is likely to have increased the reliability of their narratives.

All the interviews were done in the classroom during lunch breaks. The parents had given permission for their offspring to participate in the study and the students were happy to provide consent as well. Three interviews were done when the children were in the 8th grade and two when they had started the 9th grade, which provided longitudinal perspective. The groups consisted of two pairs of girls, one group of three girls, and only one pair of boys. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. All the names used in this chapter are pseudonyms to ensure the children's anonymity.

Youth participate in several social contexts every day, and I observed and partly participated in some of these. I observed them in classes where I had a chance to see how the children related to their teachers and peers, as well as in less formal surroundings around school where I could observe their interactions with peers. In the interviews, we spoke about the broader contexts of their friendships and leisure activities, but less about their families. Two issues took me by surprise. First, the relationship between religion, gender (including sexuality), and ethnic identity, as it emerged from their much-used emic social categories of "Norwegian" and "foreigner." This relationship was more intermingled than I first thought. Second, I was surprised to find that minority youth, often stigmatized in the Norwegian public discourse, did not aspire to be considered Norwegians.

In the following sections, I present my theoretical framework, discuss the empirical findings, and end with some concluding remarks.

Theoretical Framework

Childhood Studies and Children's Perspectives

According to James et al. (1998), conceptualizations of children prior to Freud were dominated by a developmental discourse asserting that “children become future adults” (James et al. 1998, 17–19). Research on children has often been carried out in relation to both psychological and sociological theories of socialization (Kampmann 2003). Although these theories differ, they have a common focus on the child as becoming, not being. The becoming child is viewed as an incomplete adult on its way to adulthood (James et al. 1998; Thorne 1993). The sociological and anthropological research on children initiated during the 1990s focuses on children as agents, as active participants, and as interpreters and creators of their lifeworlds. They are both being and becoming. This way of thinking was termed a “new paradigm” of child research (Kampmann 2003; James et al. 1998). Most importantly, the present-day sociology of childhood embraces studying children from their point of view. This is an experiential and phenomenological approach, taking children’s concepts, categories, and experiences as points of departure in the analysis of their everyday lives. I take the same approach in this chapter. I believe a bottom-up approach in studying children is needed, particularly regarding children of foreign born parents, as their voices—or insider’s points of view—are not often heard.

Shifting Selves, Subject Positions and Gender

The activities and self-presentations of the children I got to know changed according to situations and social contexts, particularly between home and school. Henrietta Moore, like other post-structuralist researchers, has argued that decentred selves, multiple selves, or multiple identities are acted out in different social contexts (Moore 1994). One distinction between modern and post-structuralist conceptualizations of the self is that the former reads the self as having a core, while the latter views the self as fragmented (Lorentzen and Muhleisen 2006). Moore’s theory of subject positions implies that a single subject can no longer be equated with a single individual. Each individual is a multiply constituted subject and “take [s] up multiple subject positions within a range of discourses and social practices” (Moore 1994, 55). This theoretical stance allows the study of intra-cultural variation and the construction of ethnic identities, particularly among foreign-born and their children. As such, in a situation with both parents and friends present, a daughter may position herself differently depending on her understanding of expectations from the persons interacting with her. This is highly relevant for the Norwegian-born girls of immigrants included in this study.

Similarly, ethnic identity construction is understood as presentation of self that includes ethnic cultural values concerning gender, that is, femininity and masculinity, and thus encompasses dress, hairstyle, appearance, and behaviour. This also includes ways of talking, and is relational and something persons do (West and Zimmerman 1987) or perform (Butler 1993), rather than something they are. I understand gendered identity to be embedded in ethnic identity. However, whether gender is activated or not depends on social context (Rysst 2014). Gendered ethnic identity is often constructed and done in relation to the other sex: femininity in relation to masculinity, which presuppose each other (Thorne 1993; Rysst 2008, 2014). This view understands gender as fluid and gendered identities as “shifting hybrids” (Moinian 2009, 33), or shifting selves.

Notions of Hybridity and Social Classification

Hybridity means a cultural blending and reinvention. Previous research theorizing hybridity assumed that children of immigrants occupied a space between two cultures (Anthias 2001; Back 2002, 446). This liminality affected their identity construction, sense of belonging, and well-being. More recent research suggests taking a more positive approach, viewing children of immigrants as creative *bricoleurs* who combine different cultural expressions into something new, becoming competent navigators of culture (Prieur 2004, 101; Jacobsen 2002, 32). Viewing children as creative bricoleurs is in line with the so-called “new” paradigm in childhood research presented above, which views children as having agency, not as passive objects of socialization (James et al. 1998). As such, youth mix cultural styles, values, and trends into hybrids, often related to consumer goods like clothing, which is particularly apparent in relation to gender, as I will show later.

Hybridity is often discussed in relation to globalization and the ways in which contact with different cultures results in “cultural complexity” (Hannerz 1992). Olga Nieuwenhuys argues that the post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha’s notion of “the third space,” which is an “in-between space of culture,” is “seminal for understanding the dynamics of identity negotiation in minority communities” (Nieuwenhuys 2013, 3). The vast majority of children in Dal were born in Norway to foreign-born parents and are therefore often read as having “one foot in two cultures,” or living in a space between two cultures (Back 2002, 446). In line with this conceptualization, I argue that these children participate in and negotiate ethnic identity construction in a “third space.”

Social classification, while universal, organizes people differently in different contexts, based on culturally relevant characteristics. The interesting issue, as formulated by Halleh Ghorashi et al., is “*which* categories we use and *how* we use them” (Ghorashi et al. 2009, 11). How people classify their social world tells us something about dominant cultural values in their relevant social contexts. The categories, however, are not something “natural”; they are social constructions that change with time, place, and situation (Ghorashi et al. 2009, 11).

“Norwegian” and “foreigner” are emic classificatory concepts used in all parts of Norway (Rysst 2008; Prieur 2004). In the subsequent sections I will analyze how the children I studied relate to the categories of “Norwegian” and “foreigner” and how this is reflected in what I interpret to be their construction of ethnic identity.

Ethnic Identity Construction Among the Children

“One Foot in Two Cultures”

Despite being born and raised in Norway, the children I interviewed did not appear to aspire to a Norwegian identity. When I asked Fatima, Sahra, and Pernille how they would answer the question “Where are you from?” the following conversation ensued:

Pernille: I say Norway.

Fatima: Norwegian-Pakistani.

Sahra: I say I come from Morocco, but that I was born and raised in Norway. So in a way I am from Norway... and Morocco.

Fatima: I say I am from Pakistan, but I am Norwegian-Pakistani, but in Pakistan I say I am from Norway.

Mari: And the people in Pakistan probably say you are from Norway?

Fatima: Yes...

Mari: And how does it feel to come to Pakistan, to your “homeland” so to speak, as we talk about it in Norway, and you may experience it as not your homeland...?

Sahra: It's like... you are kind of on holiday when you are here too, and when you are in Morocco... you see? We don't have a permanent homeland.

Mari: Don't you think so, is it something in between, or?

Sahra: Yes, but then I don't live in Morocco, I live in Norway...

Fatima: But then all our traditions are from our country of origin...

This conversation illustrates Sahra and Fatima's experience of “having one foot in two cultures,” which makes them somewhat ambivalent about their ethnic identity and also makes it contested. They experience having both identities. The one or the other is activated according to social context and indicates shifting selves. In addition to the two identities as Norwegian or Pakistani, they also have a third: the hybrid “Norwegian-Pakistani” (*norsk-pakistaner*). The term “norsk-pakistaner” (Norwegian-Pakistani) is probably chosen rather than “pak-istansk nordmann/norsking” (Pakistani-Norwegian) because it is phonetically easier to pronounce. In addition, the term “nordmann” provokes some feminists because of the term “mann” (man). They would favour the gender neutral “norsking,” which generally is not preferred in Norway.

The hyphenated “Norwegian-Other” category such as “Norwegian-Pakistani” is probably the most used in everyday peer contexts. They negotiate cultural values from their parents’ country of origin with values in Norwegian society in their construction of ethnic identity. This is indicated in what Fatima says about starting to wear a hijab, which, depending on social context, denotes religious and/or ethnic affiliation:

Mari: Why do you wear a headscarf? Why did you choose to put it on (in the 6th grade)?

Fatima: Because I felt ready for it. And, it is sort of “tradition” in our family to begin wearing a headscarf (starting in puberty), it’s not that you have to, but if you want you do, and I wanted to, and after I started wearing it I have become more seriously Muslim and focus more on religion than before.

Mari: So you have become more interested in religion than before?

Fatima: Yes, I think that I cannot abuse the headscarf, sort of.

The reasons why girls and women wear hijabs in Norway are frequently debated in the media, various reasons are presented, and the discourse is highly charged. It goes beyond this chapter to discuss all aspects of this discourse; suffice it to say that among the girls in this study, Fatima started wearing one because her sisters and cousins did, and for her, it symbolized increasingly serious Muslim faith.

Sahra and Fatima also said that they were proud of their heritage and the values from their parents’ homeland. However, Sahra added that she would take it as a compliment if somebody thought she was Norwegian. This may suggest that she under-communicates her aspiration to Norwegian identity, as she knows she doesn’t look Norwegian because of her very curly hair and other physical characteristics giving “foreign” connotations. In addition, they all know that hijabs do not go with the label “Norwegian.” Pernille, however, is fair and blonde and nobody gives it a second thought when she says she is Norwegian. The conversations point to how appearance is part of identity construction and how it is negotiated, developed and contested during adolescence.

The Importance of Appearance: Skin Colour

I found that teachers and other school staff did not focus explicitly on the children’s “skin colour” as a marker of racial ethnicity. “Skin colour” is here understood broadly as including all physiological characteristics associated with ethnic or racial origin. Rather, adults working there conceptualized the children themselves as “colour-blind.” This was evident when I asked Lisa, a teacher who had worked in the school for twenty years, if the children showed interest and awareness of different skin colours:

Nope. They do when they argue and don't find other words. They don't have a wide vocabulary. So, if they fight and argue, if they don't find other words, they take skin colour, but they have no reason for doing that. So I don't think THAT is a problem. And we (the teachers) have talked about it, and yes, they ARE colour-blind.

In addition, the children themselves said they did not care about skin colours in their school.

Therefore, on the surface, it appeared that skin colour was not an issue. However, observation of various events, one of which I will present below, challenges the assertion of colour-blindness (see also Seeberg 2003).

As part of the fieldwork, I was with the children in a gym and saw Robert lying on the floor, apparently very upset. It turned out that Adine had called him "nigger" (*svarting*, lit. "blackie"). Both Adine and Robert's families come from Africa. Adine's family is from Morocco, while Robert's parents come from South Africa. Adine called Robert *svarting* for no apparent reason; they were not quarrelling or fighting. Her use of the derogatory word may contradict the teacher's assertion that the students used racial terms only in cases of conflict.

The term angered the other boys in the gym. They started whispering excitedly and soon a loud, unified, aggressively repetitive "Racist, racist, racist!" was heard throughout the gym. The boys, led by Abdullah, approached Adine. She tried to hide behind me while I was trying to calm the angry boys down: "Stop, stop, don't make a fuss out of this, just leave it!" "But, listen, she is a racist!" they insisted. I told them to calm down and continue with their games, because I considered this an issue to be dealt with by the teacher, not by a researcher doing fieldwork.

The above event indicates that skin colour did have importance in their everyday life. This is supported by a comment made by Lisa, the teacher, who asserted, "Africans, they are black, they are labelled blacks, they can be called that by Pakistanis, who are labelled brown." It is my impression that the label "black" is more an expression of serious insult, as in the situation with Adine above, than the "brown" label. "Brown" is more of a descriptive classificatory term and it is not part of a legacy of racist terminology in the same way as "black." These colour distinctions may be interpreted as an indication of racialized ethnic hegemony and are also indications of a contested childhood. At Dal school, this hegemony is represented by (light) brown-skinned Asians, for instance the majority group of Pakistanis, together with ethnic Norwegians.

This example indicates that skin colour is important for identity construction among the studied children. The following conversation between Nasreen and Saira, two girls whose families are from Pakistan, further attests to this hypothesis:

Mari: I suppose you often get the question: where are you from?

Nasreen: They see it by the way we look! But people can mix up whether we come from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan... People can see whether you are Norwegian by the way you dress, they dress in "short" clothes...[to be discussed later].

Saira: Because we don't have different skin colour [the nationalities just mentioned].

Mari: But what do you think yourself, you are born in Norway, go to a Norwegian school...

Nasreen: I say I am Norwegian-Pakistani [and Saira agrees].

Mari: Would you be pleased if somebody classified you as Norwegian?

Nasreen and Saira: No.

Nasreen: Well, I am Norwegian, but not ethnic Norwegian...

Saira: We live in Norway, and have a Norwegian passport...

Like Sahra and Fatima, Nasreen and Saira too have multiple identities: one Norwegian and one Pakistani as well as the hybrid Norwegian-Pakistani. It is worth noting that they mention two Norwegian categories: "Norwegian" and "ethnic Norwegian." They may experience themselves as "Norwegian" in some social contexts, but never "ethnic Norwegian." In order to be labelled "ethnic Norwegian" they believe their parents and grandparents have to have been born in Norway, they must speak only Norwegian at home, and they should have fairer skin. They know they will not pass as ethnic Norwegians because of their physical appearance: dark hair and eyes, brownish skin.

When it comes to boys, Kofi and David were also born and raised in Norway. Both of Kofi's parents are from the Ivory Coast. David's mother is ethnic Norwegian, while his father is from Kenya. David had visited his relatives in Kenya three times during his lifetime. Yet he, like Kofi and the girls above, did not know what it is like to grow up outside Norway. Kofi said he views himself as from the Ivory Coast because his parents are from that country, while David said "I think of myself as Norwegian, although I feel that I am from another country and like to say I am from another country. I like to say that I am from Kenya. I am 'half,' but some people think I am 'whole,' from another country; but most people think I am 'half,' and when people ask I say I am 'half.'"

David said he preferred to say he was from another country because he hung out with people who are not ethnic Norwegian. His choice of friends may also be because he looks "foreign" with dark skin and African curly hair, like many of the others. In his everyday life he navigates and negotiates various cultural values by hanging out with peers having both non-Norwegian and ethnic Norwegian parents. However, an experience of belonging appears more connected to hanging out with children of immigrants. This may be because possible ethnic Norwegian friends are few in this area and children of immigrants look more similar to him. Again, the issue of skin colour appears relevant. The American psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum, in her book *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* (2003), argues that it is a necessary step in young people's identity construction to hang out and seek belonging among those with the same racialized ethnic origin. David and other children in Dal appear to support Tatum's claim of youth seeking belonging with others they define as "similar" regarding physical appearance and ethnic identity (Rysst 2014).

As indicated in the case of the girls, the boys' emphasis on non-Norwegian identity may be in part related to the fact that they have given up ever being called "Norwegian" by others because of their appearance. As already mentioned, both Kofi and David are very dark-skinned. Previous research has illustrated the

importance of whiteness for successful Nordic identity labelling (Hubinette and Tigervall 2009; Prieur 2004). This may be something these children have experienced in one way or another and, if so, the issue of skin colour and identity may be understood as highly contested. One possibility is that, because they know that their appearances hinder them in passing as ethnic Norwegians, they construct hybrid gendered ethnic identities in a third space marking them off from majority Norwegians.

As these examples indicate, I suggest the expression and question “always a foreigner?” is relevant among the “foreigners” I studied because they appear to claim an identity as “foreigners” rather than “Norwegians.” My conversation with Melek, of Turkish origin, and Hadia, of Moroccan origin, also underlines this:

Mari: What do you think about having a Norwegian identity? I know that at this school you classify yourselves as “Norwegians” and “foreigners.” How do you think about yourself?

Hadia: I think that I am a foreigner!

Melek: So do I, even though I was born in Norway.

Mari: Do you think that’s ok, do you like it that way, your appearance (fair skinned) is after all not obviously foreign?

[Both of them laugh].

Hadia: But I like it...

Mari: You like saying that you are a foreigner?

Hadia: Yes, but it is so common here, it’s not something I like or not, it’s common, yes. I can say I am a foreigner everywhere in Norway, sort of.

Mari: You too? [I address Melek].

Melek: Yes, it’s very common, normal, I don’t reflect about it, I just say I am a foreigner, sort of, that I come from Turkey.

Mari: I understand from what you say here, that it’s not important for you to be classified and labelled Norwegian?

Both: No.

Mari: And what about David? Would you say he is Norwegian or foreigner?

Melek: Both, he is both really... I really think he is the same as us, because even though we experience ourselves as foreigners, we are Norwegian as well. We were born and raised here, so we are used to this culture, and when we go to Turkey or Morocco, we experience a difference between us and the people living there. They look upon us as more Norwegian than Turkish, I think.

As is indicated in this conversation, physiological characteristics are important. David, although his mother is all white and he has lived his whole life in Norway, is classified as both a foreigner and Norwegian, probably because of his dark skin colour. This suggestion is based on the fact that his African father has not been living with David or the mother for many years; they have no contact. Besides, David has only friends of foreign origin, in addition to one of mixed origin in a higher grade, who is also dark skinned.

The conversation also illustrates the relevance of multiple identities, here from the point of view of others than themselves: they are classified as Norwegian in their “homeland” but as “foreigners” in Norway. They have one foot in two cultures, not two feet in one culture. As such, skin colour, understood broadly, appears as having high relevance in a migrancy perspective. Recall Näre’s definition of migrancy described at the beginning of this chapter. In Norway, skin colour appears to decisively illustrate migrancy as something “which is inscribed on certain bodies by the larger society in general” (Näre 2012, 604). The consequence in my study was that children conceptualized themselves as “Norwegian,” “foreigner,” or the hybrid “Norwegian-Pakistani” depending on the context (they also used other hybrid ethnic combinations).

The Importance of Appearance: Clothes

The importance of appearance for ethnic identity construction also involves clothing, as Nasreen indicated above: “People can see whether you are Norwegian by the way you dress; they [Norwegians] dress in ‘short’ clothes.” This utterance implicitly points to the intermingling of ethnic identity construction and age and gender, as well as religion and sexuality. Among the study participants, Islam was the only religion referred to in relation to clothes and dress. Other options were inspired by main street fashion. Nasreen’s statement also points to what I read as an illustration of contested childhood: the negotiation of different, conflicting cultural values regarding what is considered suitable attire, and thus gender construction. Our conversations on clothing, first in the 8th and later in the 9th grade, highlight the importance of a covering-up code, directly informed by cultural interpretations of Islam. “Short” clothes do not cover the body and are thus not acceptable.

In the group interview referred to above with Pernille, Sahra, and Fatima, who wore a hijab, I asked explicitly about clothing styles among their classmates. Fatima said, “The three of us sport almost the same style.” I then commented on her hijab, an item not worn by the other two girls. She said that besides for the hijab, “we like the same clothes.” The following conversation ensued:

Sahra: We don’t like short clothes; we want to hide our bottoms...

Mari: Hmm... I think that is rather usual among Muslim girls... ethnic Norwegians don’t think like this?

Sahra: No, she (Pernille) is very influenced by how we... I don’t mean to insult by saying this... but one gets influenced by the people one hangs out with and she doesn’t socialize with very many Norwegians...

Pernille: In Norway when I wear shorts I have something underneath (tights), but if I am elsewhere, I can go without because there I don’t know people. And then I don’t get gazes or comments on what I wear. But I can get that here if I only wear shorts...

Mari: But what kind of comments do you risk getting?

Sahra: She has never got any, but mostly from the boys... they can look at you in a mischievous way and ask "what are you wearing," sort of...

Sahra and Fatima then comment that Pernille once wore shorts to school, at which Pernille underscores that she wore tights underneath, meaning that her legs were acceptably covered. This suggests that Sahra and Fatima believe Pernille lacks the proper skills for dressing acceptably. In their view, wearing shorts to school is just not done, while tights are ok as long as they are combined with a long tunika, shirt or sweater.

They also add that in general, they do not like showing much of their bodies, so they wear long sweaters, jackets, or tunics over jeans or tights. Pernille, in spite of being ethnic Norwegian, still wanted to cover up in situations where she risked comments (Rysst 2014). In other words, her gendered subject position differed according to social context; one among peers of foreign origin and another among people of unknown origins and/or ethnic Norwegians. It is worth noting that, as a 13-year-old, she preferred a style I read as hybrid rather than Norwegian. I interpret Pernille's choice of style, and thus gender construction, as her way of securing her friendships, particularly with Sahra. Sahra, as a Muslim, has internalized and acted according to the covering-up code. Pernille adapted to the Dal majority's dressing norms which probably made it easier for her to experience belonging among her best friend(s) in most of the peer contexts.

Pernille is the only child in this study who explicitly expressed what I interpret as an indication of a shifting self, or variations of subject position according to context. Still, Muslim girls' way of dressing and behaving in family contexts versus school and peers shows the relevance of a "shifting selves" perspective, which I return to at the end of this subsection. Only four of the thirteen girls in the 8th grade wore headscarves. However, the majority of the girls wore very modest clothing, concealing rather than revealing the shapes of their bodies. Only three girls—Melek of Turkish origin, Nasreen of Pakistani origin, and Helen of Thai origin—adopted mainstream Western fashion, usually tight jeans with short blouses or sweaters. I am not sure if Malek or Nasreen wore more traditional clothing proscribed for Muslim girls within their familial context.

We discussed the clothing styles of the other girls in the students' class, and thus gained insight into how the girls felt they presented themselves. The thirteen-year-olds, Sahra, Pernille, and Fatima agreed that there existed an "ethnic-religious style." This included the hijabs and long traditional skirts typical of Somali girls. They also mentioned the three girls in their class who sport the "Norwegian style" of tight jeans with shorter sweaters. Sahra, Pernille, and Fatima, however, are somewhere in between these two. They are *bricoleurs*, or navigators of culture. In line with this, I interpret them as constructing a hybrid gendered ethnic identity, which represents the third feminine position in their peer culture. By positioning themselves in this way, they managed to fit in among Muslims expecting them to hide their bodies, and among Norwegians, because these girls bought their clothes in the same shops as Norwegians. The only difference was that they more often bought longer tops to cover their bottoms if they wore tight jeans,

and did not wear shorts to school. This was the general fashion among Norwegian teenagers in 2013–2014. The majority of girls at Dal school are understood to “do gender” through varieties of this hybrid style, which may be with or without hijabs, but which generally had covering up at its core (Rysst 2014).

Kofi and David confirmed that the highly gendered norm of girls covering up is part of their peer context. In contrast to the girls, the boys at Dal did not mark themselves off from ethnic Norwegian boys in the same conspicuous manner. They had no religiously derived dress codes. I therefore did not talk with them about their own ways of dressing, but was curious about the boys’ opinions of girls’ presentations of self and ways of dressing. I broached the subject by asking who they considered to be the popular girls in their class. David said quickly “Some think they are more popular” (and indicated Nasreen). We commented on the appearances of the girls in general, noting that some girls wore hijabs but otherwise most wore Norwegian (covering up) clothes. Then David said that “girls get a plus if they wear a hijab; it is a good thing.” Kofi added “It’s a good thing to cover up when young,” which was a unanimous opinion, they agreed, at this school.

Against this backdrop, Melek and Nasreen were of particular interest because they wear Norwegian-style clothing despite being Muslim and well aware of the dominant gender hierarchy at Dal. As we have seen, the majority of girls and boys in the 8th grade, irrespective of religious or ethnic background, appeared to agree on the value of covering-up which illustrates the ideological power hierarchy at this school and is also an indication of how their childhood is contested. This hierarchy had Islamic-inspired cultural values at the top, which organized Islamic-inspired femininities to encompass the covering-up dress code. Embedded in this cultural interpretation of Islam is heterosexual normativity. According to Judith Butler, heterosexual normativity refers to an institutionalized assumption that all humans are heterosexual as a basis for the organization of modern life (Butler 1993, 3). The girls construct their gendered ethnic identity according to a factual or imagined heterosexual judging gaze informed by a cultural interpretation of Islam. This gaze may be interpreted as an experience of being uncomfortable when concealment was violated, and appeared in the interviews with most of the girls. The following conversation with Hadia, who has Moroccan parents, and Melek in the 9th grade is particularly interesting, because, as mentioned above, Melek was one of the girls not covering up in the 8th grade:

Hadia: For me it is, like uncomfortable, to wear low necked jumpers and clothes that don’t conceal...

Mari: But why is it important to wear long sweaters and such?

Melek: As Hadia said, I don’t feel very comfortable either if I wear a very open top, or sweater, I don’t feel comfortable, some use long sweaters because they think that is correct in their culture or religion, while others do it because they don’t feel comfortable. So... yes.

Nasreen, who did not cover up in the 8th grade either, can now be understood to also position her gender construction in the covering up discourse. The following

conversation was part of the interview with Saira and Nasreen cited previously. The conversation on covering up started with religion:

Nasreen: Our parents would like us to be as religious as they are, but they don't force us, they say that girls should cover up in our religion, but they also say it's up to us. They don't say "cover up," but rather "pray, it only takes you three minutes!"

Mari: But when you shop for clothes, do you choose clothes that cover up?

Saira: Well, I look for clothes that conceal, but if I find something else very nice, I buy it, and put something longer underneath or over the shorter one.

Mari: And what exactly, is it you want to conceal?

Saira: [Laughs] the bottom...

Nasreen: Your skin, hair and bottom...

Mari: Hmm, yes. And last year it was easy to buy fashionable clothes that covered up. But now these are more difficult to find?

Saira: Yes, now the clothes are sort of... shorter... And it is difficult, yes. Because we cannot wear the same old sweaters and dresses every day! The Norwegian girls have a much easier time finding suitable clothes!

The narratives of all these girls indicate that gendered ethnic identity construction at Dal involves the covering up dress code as a vital element. They all have internalized that they are to hide their bottoms and skin. In addition, they are aware of the restrictions they, as Muslim girls, experience compared to ethnic Norwegians, indicating different parental practices and thus contestations of childhood. There is some implicit envy, or at least ambivalence, in what they say:

Saira: I think that the Norwegian girls, it's not difficult for them to choose clothes and such, because they can wear what they want, the parents don't say anything, they don't have to cover up...

Mari: So you think that Norwegian girls have an easier time?

Nasreen and Saira: Yes, because we have some simple rules, that we have to wear certain clothes, we have to think twice, it takes time for us to get dressed properly.

Nasreen: But it's not that we very much want to dress "Norwegian," it's sort of ok for us, we create our own style. And when we are going to a party with only girls, we don't dress according to the "rules"!! [she laughs loudly].

This also indicates how their construction of gendered ethnic identity is influenced by values deriving from both their parents' country of origin and from Norway where they were born. Nasreen and Saira reflect on how they experience their own situation regarding socially acceptable clothes compared to how they consider ethnic Norwegian girls' situation. They negotiate cultural values of gender in order to comply with the existing cultural norms in their various social contexts. The conversation also illustrates contested childhood and shifting selves related to the dominant Islam-inspired discourse of covering up and conflicting Norwegian values: "And when we are going to a party with only girls, we don't dress according to the 'rules'!!" One subject position is to follow parental-imposed gender rules of

covering up and modesty when they are in public contexts with both genders and in family contexts. The other is to break these rules when they are in the company of female peers, because they appear irrelevant from a heterosexual normative standpoint.

The heterosexual male gaze is also part of how girls construct gender through clothes. The girls related to this in an ambiguous and interesting manner. In the 8th grade, the boys said they thought it a good idea for girls to cover up. When I confronted Fatima, Pernille, and Sahra about this, they laughed, and Sahra said: “If that was so then, this has changed now! They like girls that show their bottoms... we notice that they look at us...” Nasreen and Saira reacted in a similar manner, and even said that they felt the boys to be hypocrites. Saira commented: “Fuck, no!” And Nasreen continued: “Well, they can probably say to you and older people that they like girls who cover up, but we know what they really mean inside... they tell us about nice girls elsewhere who have attractive bottoms and bodies...” It appears that the girls did care about the boys’ views on attractiveness. So when I asked if they dress and act in accordance with what they believed the boys like (heteronormativity), Saira said: “Yes, in a way, because we want them to like us...” This dialogue may point to how the boys relate, unconsciously, to the whore and Madonna discourse: respectable girls cover up, while uncovered girls are more exciting. The girls accordingly experienced contradictory and ambiguous expectations in their construction of gendered ethnic identity as Muslim Turkish-Norwegians, Muslim Moroccan-Norwegians and Muslim Pakistani-Norwegians girls.

The varieties of femininities were more difficult to distinguish in the 9th grade compared to the 8th. The hybrid dressing style of simultaneous concealment and fashion was stretched to its limits when mainstream fashion dictated even shorter skirts than last year. The covering up code met structural restrictions by way of the latest fashion design. This meant girls had to combine older, longer clothes with new, shorter ones. It also meant they had to show more of their bottoms than before. They knew the boys preferred this, but their parents probably did not. I frequently observed girls desperately pulling down and stretching their sweaters as far as they would go in order to hide more of their bottoms. The result was the same femininity positions as before, but the hybrid had come closer to the Norwegian way of not covering up (Rysst 2014).

The Importance of Language

An interesting, related issue is the development of spoken language among Norwegian-born children and youth of immigrant parents. Norwegian integration and school policy underlines the importance of learning the Norwegian language. This is prioritized in Dal from a very early age, as kindergartens have reduced their fees in order to help children of immigrant parents to learn Norwegian before entering school. Even though all my informants were born and raised in Norway,

they still speak with a recognizable accent. This applies to girls and boys of all ethnic backgrounds and their particular way of speaking is widespread in the area. For instance, it dominates at the Club, a free leisure time youth programme organized by the local school authorities. The Club offers a programme for children of all ages (10–16) and both sexes, and constitutes a third space in the sense that most of the young people who use the Club regularly have parents of various foreign origins. Hybrid cultural expressions like rap music fill this place. The Norwegian language is mixed with English and words from Urdu and other languages into what has been termed “kebab-Norwegian”—a hybrid, “cool” social dialect understood as part of their identity construction. It may be read as an effort to increase their dignity and self-respect. The dialect does not only include new words, but also “incorrect,” unconventional grammar and new intonation. This makes their spoken language sound “foreign” compared to other Norwegian dialects and underlines their understanding of themselves as “foreigners.” Most interestingly, the ethnic Norwegians use this social dialect as well, illustrating how a minority group adapts to the norms of the majority. When I confronted the girls when they had entered the 9th grade about this particular way of speaking, they were astonished:

Mari: Are you aware of the fact that you talk with a different intonation than people do in other parts of Oslo?

Fatima, Sahra and Pernille: Do we??

Fatima: I haven’t noticed. I think we talk the same all of us...

Mari: No, you don’t. It is also audible during Norwegian classes, when you are to perform something in class, you have this special dialect.

Sahra and Fatima: We haven’t noticed it.

Mari: You haven’t thought about it?

Both: No. But Melek talks a bit more adult like when she presents something, she has a richer vocabulary.

Mari: So you don’t know that you have a special intonation, your own dialect...

Sahra: Do you mean kebab-Norwegian?? We know THAT!

Mari: Do you talk that way as well?

Sahra: Not as a language, but when we are making jokes and fooling around...

Pernille: Just a few words.

Sahra: Our language is not like that [meaning kebab-Norwegian].

Mari: But is there anyone in this class using such a language?

Sahra: The boys!

Mari: Do you mean that the boys use kebab-Norwegian more than you do?

All: Yes, they really only speak that way.

Pernille: They don’t speak proper Norwegian, sort of, they talk with big words, that’s how they always talk to each other.

Before this interview, I had wondered if kebab-Norwegian was more advanced and ordinary among the boys. I wondered if the dialect served as a more important identity marker among them because clothes did not have the same role as markers of belonging as among the girls. The girls above confirmed this assumption. According to them, the boys mostly speak in this fashion and have a wider vocabulary, while the girls use this dialect (the words) only occasionally. However, the intonation was constant for both girls and boys. The dialect is an indication of how particular hybrid expressions develop in a third space to ensure social inclusion and dignity within a contested childhood and migrancy framework.

Concluding Remarks: Contesting Ascribed Ethnic Identities in Migrancy

This chapter has shown and discussed the challenges children of foreign-born parents face in their ethnic identity constructions in Norway, which includes contesting and navigating cultural values of both their parents' country of origin and the country in which they are born. As *bricoleurs* and competent navigators of culture, the boys' and girls' identity constructions move beyond the emic dichotomous social categories of "Norwegian" and "foreigner." The children construct hybrid identities such as Norwegian-Pakistani, which may or may not include an Islamic-inspired feminine dress code of covering up, in addition to a particular social dialect.

The complex relationship between gender, ethnicity, age, and religion regarding identity construction has been shown to have various expressions depending on social context. This suggests that future studies of migrancy and hybridity may fruitfully be combined with postcolonial theory emphasizing both the phenomenon of "third spaces" and the importance of "shifting selves" depending on social contexts. These theoretical perspectives combined may allow us to elucidate how ascribed ethnic identities and migrancy frameworks may be approached in order to reduce the intensity of future contestations of childhood.

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